TRANSCRIPT—Bruce Whitaker

Fairview Community History Project

Interviewee: Bruce Whitaker

Interviewers: Judith Robertson

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Tealey Ellis: In the most recent Town Crier I read your really interesting, amazing article about Swannanoa and living there and you were born there, is that correct?

Bruce Whitaker: Yes, I was raised there, I was born in St. Joseph, but I was raised there and built a home here after I got an adult. Since it got to falling I moved back to Swannanoa to my grandmother's house which is only two steps and he took out the parts that the taxis delivered hookers. I don't know why, but he did, that was part of the deal, too, that's the way it was.

TE: That's just the way it worked then. So, your family, both sides of your family are from the Swannanoa area?

BW: No, my father and all his family was from Fairview. My mother's father was an Ingle, he was from Leicester, and my grandmother Ingle was a Davis, her father was from Averys Creek, her mother was from Transylvania County. But all my daddy's people, every one of them was from Fairview.

TE: When you were a child, though, you lived in Swannanoa?

BW: Yeah, as a child I was raised in Swannanoa, my grandpa and grandma Ingle lived next door, and every Saturday we'd come over to stay with grandmother who lived on Laurel

Pines Church Road. Because back then people used to have children as late as they possibly could for them farm hands. And my grandmother and grandma were both 41 when my daddy was born. She was really the age of my great-grandmother. Didn't have Social Security back then so when the oldest kid got married you wanted another one to come along and take his hoe.

TE: Someone had to do the work.

BW: Yes, somebody had to

TE: And you couldn't necessarily pay to have it done.

BW: No, you couldn't pay to have it done and so people tried to have their last child as close to fifty as they could.

TE: That was some planning, wasn't it?

Judith Robertson: That area, Laurel Pines Church, that area, was it developed, were there houses around there? Right now, it's highly developed in that area.

BW: Well, there were several houses on the road. Now it was originally I think part of the Wright place, and my grandfather bought some land there, the land on the right hand side of the road and built a house there, oh, in the late 1920s and then he sold part to his nephew, who was also his brother-in-law, who was Liz's boy and he married my grandmother's sister who was his second wife [ ]. Essentially till probably 1950, there were only two families on that short road. Uncle Lonnie Jenkins, or Preacher Jenkins, and my grandpa and grandma lived there. And Mitchells ended up buying that across the road and they moved a bunch of houses there because Miss Mitchell's daddy was Crouch and he was a house mover in Buncombe County and when they built 40 you got all those houses for free, so I think at one time they had something like 70 some rental houses.

JR: So that's how that whole little community developed.

BW: Yeah, because when the 40 come through he got all those houses and he put a bunch of them over there for her to rent in other places as well. Because I think they were basically giving them away, I know a feller across the railroad track from us in Swannanoa, he got three of them, and helped my grandfather mix concrete, 'cause he put the foundation in under it.

TE: How long did you live in Swannanoa? How did you get to Fairview?

BW: I moved to, I built a house in Fairview in 1987.

TE: What was Fairview like in 1987?

BW: Well, it was, on Old Fort Road it wasn't too much more built up than it is now, because maybe up in the mountains and stuff, because probably I know a third of the land in Fairview was originally swamps, so when they got stricter with septic tanks, a lot of it wouldn't perk and that cut down on a lot of the building, because you have to put in a sewage treatment thing I hear it runs about 20,000 and you come by and check it once a year and I'm sure they hit you up for something every year. So that kind of slowed down development on Old Fort Road. Most of the development was up on the mountains, because so much of it wouldn't't perk. It was too expensive to build on that if it wouldn't perk.

TE: What was, you said 1987, Fairview like in terms of any businesses?

BW: Well, there were probably, there were few more businesses here, but there weren't too many businesses here. About the only new businesses would be Dollar General and this shopping center next door, because it was close enough to town and people here pretty well to a large extent went to Greenville to buy stuff anyway.

JR: And people didn't shop every day back then, did they?

BW: Not too much

JR: They had their weekly trip to town.

BW: They used to. When I was growing up in Swannanoa, people living in the county and people living in Asheville never had nothing in common. I know when I was a kid we'd go into Cincinnati and buy stuff maybe once a year, something like that, go to a ball game and then come back. You wouldn't run to town much and I still don't do that. I only buy stuff in an emergency in Asheville, buy the rest of it somewhere else.

TE: I don't go into Asheville much

BW: Today most of the clothes I get I go to Nashville for a weekend or a week and go to yard sales on the rich-y south side, or go to Atlanta and go up to Buckhead on the rich-y north side and get shirts from Saks or something for a dollar. And you just go there and maybe see a show and go to the yard sales on Saturday, go to the big flea markets on Friday and buy your stuff there, you get better stuff, you just get it nearly for nothing.

TE: And why did you decide to move to Fairview and build a house?

BW: Well, it was more or less still home, even though I didn't live here, all the older families were kin. My great-uncle lived, was wanting to sell an acre and a half next to his house, so I bought it from him. It had essentially been in the family since the 1790s. Might have switched one side of the family to the other. I built it, and it's up on a hill where there's no chance of flooding, even though it borders Cane Creek, it's a hundred foot above it. It had the best view of anywhere around. It's got a better view than most places up on the mountain. I used to live up on a hill, still do, in Swannanoa, and I used to see all them houses along the Swannanoa get flooded every year. So, I didn't want to live near the Creek.

TE: How would you compare coming to Fairview and living versus living full-time in Swannanoa?

BW: Even though I had a lot of acquaintances through church, most, all the older people around here were somehow akin. Everybody thought alike and agreed on everything pretty well. They was brought up the same way, you had more in common with them. Because in Swannanoa, most of the people around there weren't originally from Swannanoa because when Beacon was built, as I said, they got to go for twenty-five years without paying property taxes, and part of that deal the machine got to [ ] the personnel manager, and he wasn't hiring many people from Swannanoa. He would bring them in from Cleveland County and Rutherford County and South Yancy County. And there weren't many people from Swannanoa there, because

JR: Why?

BW: They didn't vote right. He wouldn't hire a Republican. [laughter] And mountain people out in the country tended to be a lot of those, after you got outside the city, so he wouldn't hire none of them, so he'd bring people from somewhere else in. And they used to be bad for that. Each little township had a boss. And he would call their boss. And they didn't recommend you, he didn't hire you. So virtually no one that worked at Beacon was originally from Swannanoa. He hired a slew of them from Pensacola section of Yancy County, a lot from Rutherford or Cleveland County, or upper South Carolina or Georgia. But there wasn't very many from Swannanoa.

JR: Those people moved

BW: Yeah, they moved up here.

JR: So that was a real boon for Swannanoa.

BW: Well, it was a real boom in a way, I don't know if it benefited the local people that much, but it did the other people.

JR: Well, unless they owned a grocery store

BW: They didn't benefit too much.

JR: It would have meant more building.

BW: There was more building. They had probably ten or twelve stores there at one time that did a pretty good business. And Beacon had a home store where you could buy stuff on credit, and I reckon they'd take it out of your check.

TE: Like a company store

BW: Company store, yeah, they had that. Because they had essentially bought the Whitson farm and built it on that. There was a few stores along the railroad track originally because of the railroad track. That probably doubled the number of businesses there and increased the population. And since they didn't hire nobody from Swannanoa much was the reason they had to build the two mill villages to house them.

JR: And I guess that is the way many small communities in this part of the world operated.

BW: If you'd hired local people they wouldn't've had to have much like that, but if you bring them in from Pensacola, it's hard to drive all the way from work, even today it'd be a pretty long ride. And they even hired people from Flag Pond, Tennessee and stuff like that. It's amazing all those people that worked there, none of them hardly was from Swannanoa.

TE: The lengths that some people go to achieve what they want.

BW: Yeah.

TE: You mentioned that one of the things about moving to Fairview and building a home was that basically there were a lot of kinfolk around and people that you knew. Was they any additional factor that helped you to make that decision.

BW: Well, that was mostly the thing because there was a lot of kin people, all got along and thought the same and stuff like that. Basically, you had a support group, which is like when they move here nearly all the first families, fifteen-twenty miles from Lexington, what was then Rowan County it's now Davidson. People tended to move somewhere with friends or relatives. Because that way you had your own support group and they'd look out for one another because the intermarriage and stuff.

TE: What do you think about that today, a support system around.

BW: Well, I think one reason there are so many divorces anymore is because people used to marry people from their own neighborhood and too, they might be 3rd or 4th cousins and stuff and believed the same thing, they were brought up the same way. It made it easier to get along, where if you, like if somebody from here marries somebody from New York, they really have nothing in common. The more you have in common, I think, the better it is, because if you've got your beliefs, somebody else has got their beliefs, both want to have their way. That's one reason to have divorce rates and stuff. Used to, people don't like you, but you didn't necessarily marry for love, either, because if somebody had a little land or a little money, that made more difference because you were a self-sufficient farmer

TE: And if you married a third or fourth cousin it kind of kept it in the family.

BW: It kept it in the family and two, you looked for somebody that would be kind of a provider, whether man or woman, that's why you find a lot of real old men, young girls would marry them, and sometimes younger boys would marry pretty old women, because they had a little land and money. Survival wasn't guaranteed, you had to dig it out of the ground, and if somebody had a farm or already had a pretty nice house, or a lot of cattle, something like that, that made it easier for you, than starting from scratch. Like I know my grandmother's Uncle

French Reed, he married his mother's first cousin, and she was almost old enough to be his daddy, but she was a McBrayer, and McBrayers had land and money. And when she died, then he married a girl younger than all of his children by his first wife and she married him 'cause he had a little land and money then. That was a common thing because it helped them survive. There wasn't no welfare or food stamps or public housing then. It made more difference if somebody had a little land or money. And like when you're getting up at four in the morning to feed the livestock and working the fields all day, when you get in house you're shelling corn or making clothes, you really didn't have that much time not to get along.

JR: You're pulling for a common cause.

BW: Survival was the number one issue. They were more interested in that than pretty or stuff like that. Back then, pretty went fast, you looked old.

TE: Workd hard out in the elements.

BW: Out in the elements. When my daddy was born, my grandmother was 41, and she looked as old then as she did when she died. You really aged quick so beauty didn't make that much difference. They were more interested in a little land and a little money, and someone who could help you survive. But really one person couldn't make it on their own, you had to have a husband and a wife and usually you had to have some kids and if you didn't have kids you seen it hard because you didn't have their labor, and people would fight over orphans. Everybody wanted them to put them to work. None of that's true anymore, kids don't work, but back then, you're five years old, you're out in the garden with a hoe.

TE: Over the interviews Judith and I've done, we've interviewed men, women, couples together, and various age groups. One of the themes that have run through pretty common from the much older people that we've interviewed is that, back in the day with

Fairview you talk about support systems, they talked about a sense of community, that the community came together to maybe to get something done, people needed help or something. I'm not from here and haven't lived here long so I don't really know when the influx started, but from your perspective, when did Fairview start to change, with a lot of folks moving in, and how has that affected

BW: It never really started people moving in much until the '60s. Up till then it was mostly local people and the people that moved in would be from Rutherford County. Each little township is completely different and had different ideas. Like, you normally think like slavery, you'd find that more in the country, the hotbed of slavery was Asheville. That's where they had most of the slaves. And virtually everybody that settled Asheville early come from Virginia where they had slaves. Where, nearly everybody in Fairview come from Quaker country and probably were Quaker from Pennsylvania and then they all moved together in the same place, what's now Davidson County, Rowan then, and then they moved here. They had entirely different beliefs and stuff, they didn't go for slavery. I can remember my daddy would not eat in a restaurant that had a waitress. He didn't believe in that. When I was a kid growing up there were four cafeterias in Asheville and most of the people from Fairview would always eat in a cafeteria because they didn't believe you should be waited on. We'd either eat, used to be S&W and they had two Baileys, and then they had a Dale's downtown at one time, too. They would eat there or eat at the drive-in. They thought that was wrong for somebody to wait on your table. They didn't believe in nobody carrying your luggage, or anything like that. What gets me, so many northerners moved down here, they're supposed to, they wanted to be waited on hand and foot, just like some old Mississippi planter. But people out here wouldn't. None of these brothers and sisters. They didn't go for that waitress business. They thought that was wrong. People

carrying your luggage and all such as that. It was the northerners brought that in here. That's just the way people believed. They were self-sufficient, and I noticed growing up, nearly all the blacks when they would die in Asheville, were from South Carolina. When Asheville started becoming a tourist trap, they couldn't get local people to work in the hotels, because they wouldn't carry your luggage, they weren't going to get you a cup of coffee, so they brought their children, or former slaves, or their children up to Asheville to work in all the hotels, because the local people wouldn't do that. Well, when I was growing up, nearly every older black person that died it would always say they were from Orangeburg County, South Carolina, or Bamberg, or Anderson or something, they weren't from here. And what blacks that were from Fairview, they were pretty independent too. Mountain people wouldn't do that. They found out right in a hurry if you come up here on a train, wanted somebody to carry your suitcase. They'd just tell you, You're the one that brought it, you carry it.

JR: It all goes back to that self-sufficiency

BW: Yeah. You wanted a cup of coffee, they tell you to get up off your ass and go get it. You're the one who wants it. And they wouldn't hire local people. Local people wouldn't do that.

TE: How do you see, with the history that you have of Fairview, how do you see Fairview today?

BW: Well, it's gradually becoming Asheville-ized. A lot of the people, the younger people are moving out. A lot of people like have moved to Rutherford County, because land is cheaper and things down there haven't changed like they have in Buncombe County.

JR: So, you're seeing native families moving to Rutherford County.

BW: Yeah, Rutherford County, Henderson County, Haywood County, Greenville, Tennessee, because it's still like it used to be here when they were growing up. A lot of local people move out because it's cheaper...

JR: And because they can get pretty good value for the land. I mean, you sell your property that's been in your family used to worth five dollars an acre

BW: You take a house that would bring $300,000 in Buncombe County, probably wouldn't bring $150,000 in Rutherford County. And it would be a whole lot cheaper in McDowell County. But more so Rutherford than it would here. You can look on Zillow and for houses up on that, and over in Greenville, Tennessee, you still see two-bedroom, one bath houses for $21,000. And the culture's like it was here when people were growing up, and that's an added incentive for local people to move out. I know I used to work the window at the West Asheville Post Office for twenty-some years. I've been retired about ten. The last couple of years they had me go work the election in precinct 13 in West Asheville behind Calvary Church, because none of these northerners would work in it because it was precinct 13, they

JR: You mean they were too uppity?

BW: They were superstitious.

JR: Oh, the number 13.

BW: And I tell you it didn't bother me. I had an aunt born on Friday the 13th and she lived to be 113, so I don't see it hurt her too bad. I worked three elections over there, and in three elections I saw one person I knew. The whole thing has been depopulated and repopulated in 10 years. That's how much people had left.

TE: While some individuals as you just described are moving to other counties where land might be a little cheaper, and so forth, what is the overall Fairview opinion if you will, of the new group of people that are coming in?

BW: They have no more in common than Russians or Japanese would have in common, they have no similarities in religion, culture or nothing. And they very seldom have anything to do with one another. The new people think they know everything, everything has to be their way, and mountain people think they're right, so there's not any real connection between them, they have nothing in common.

TE: You know a lot of what's going on in Fairview. How would you describe how land prices have changed in the past ten years.

BW: Oh, they went up outrageously. I think when I bought the land for my house, I didn't build it then, in '78 seems like I got that acre and a half for five thousand, or something or other like that. And then I had an acre and point one in across the road, I recently sold for sixty thousand. And it sold in one week. It's went up that much.

JR: So, the people who have lived here for a long time and owned their land, when they sold their land, to move to one of these other counties, they had a nice pot of gold.

BW: They could sell their house here, and buy one and pay cash for one in these other counties and

JR: Have the money to live on.

BW: They probably had quite a bit of money left over. So, there's a big advantage to that, a lot of people are moving big time to McDowell County now from Buncombe. But still, my aunt's house, she married a man from Old Fort down there, it's three bedrooms, two baths, full basement, nine acres, and someone says they're giving 200,000 for it. That is a big price

down there. And you know, that's a fifteen-, twenty-minute drive. That isn't far. So, they're moving in these other counties, and you can see it in how the voting's changed. Like Charlotte was one of the first Republican areas of the state, and all the counties around it were 80% Democrat. And now Charlotte is 70% Democrat and those counties that used to be 80% Democrat are now 80% Republican. So, the cities are all Democrat now and the rural counties are all Republican, it used to be the reverse.

TE: Shift and change

BW: So, people that they don't agree with new people coming in, you all get together to move somewhere else. So, the people that used to live in Mecklenburg now live in Gaston and Union and Cabarras and Iredell and York County, South Carolina.

TE: Does Fairview in your opinion have an African American community? And over your time in Fairview how have those individuals been received?

BW: The African American community basically disappeared because right down there on Concord Road, near where Trinity Baptist Church is, just past that, there's still an African American community. Most of the rest of them sold out and moved to Asheville or somewhere else early. They were quite a few around sixty or seventy years ago. They eventually left and went to town, somewhere else, because there really wasn't any, the farming community disappeared, and with tractors and stuff like that they all moved out. The only place you could find them would be down there south of Trinity Baptist Church. There's still a black community there, but the rest of it all disappeared. At one time there were quite a few around. People that were former slaves. A lot of time the owners give them a little bit of land, something like that, and they stayed around and worked here. But they were pretty well all left to a large extent, rural blacks everywhere have all left and moved to the city, because they've got a different type of

community anymore. Don't need labor, tractors and everything took their place, went to the city for better jobs. There wasn't that much opportunity out here. Most of them lived down on Cane Creek there, or up around Hollywood Road, because that was the areas there was enough larger or flat land where people needed slaves or needed hired hands. And the people that settled in those areas were the people that didn't come from blacks (?) and stuff like that. People who had slaves were Edmondsons, and I think they come from down the eastern part of the state, they had slaves. Ashworths, they were from Virginia. Pittillos, they were from Burke or McDowell County, they had them, and the Merrells and stuff like that. But the people that had moved from Pennsylvania to Davidson County here, they didn't have them. They didn't believe in that. If you weren't kin, they didn't want you around their house anyway.

TE: During your years living in Fairview, do you think there were people who were considered leaders in Fairview?

BW: Oh yeah, it used to be the Merrells and the Ashworths were the ones that run the show

TE: In what way, describe that.

BW: They're the ones that run the stores, they had the most money, and they always did. They were the ones that run the church. The ones that have the most money tend to run the show in any community and they were the ones that did. And maybe to a lesser extent the Pinkertons, Alfred Pinkerton run that thing and more or less acted as the lawyer and stuff on Old Fort Road, where all my people were from, and he's the one that made the wills and deeds and charged the road. Local people, you didn't pay property tax in cash, you worked out your property tax on the road. Each little neighborhood, Alfred Pinkerton was the one that got the crew together, to work off their property taxes keeping up the road. And he's the one that run the school. Fairview used

to have twelve or thirteen different school districts. Like on Old Fort Road there was Laurel Bluff schoolhouse and there was Black Knob schoolhouse. They were one-room schoolhouses. They met when they weren't needed on the farm. Like right after Christmas the time that it was too cold to plant, and after you got your garden planted and before it came in, they would hire a teacher and they might have, I got one school roll I think 1903, Alfred Pinkerton was the teacher and he had over a hundred students. And they went anywhere from six-year-old to twenty-two or twenty-three. And that's where they had those school districts. In Laurel Bluff, the people, the lower end of Old Fort Road, and they had little ones all around and their schedule was adjusted according to the farming. Usually, school was only taught by the most successful person in the neighborhood. Someone that had accomplished something. Right now, teachers who had been in school since they were five years old and never worked or nothing else, I really don't think they make as good teachers as someone that's worked and made something out of himself. The one who's made something of himself's talking from experience and what teachers know they heard from somebody never worked a day in their life neither. I think they were better teachers because they actually did something. If you know what you're talking about, people are more apt to listen to you.

TE: Some of the names you've mentioned, Merrell in particular, Ashworth, I've heard those names. But this is the first time I recall hearing the name Pinkerton. Who was that? Are there still Pinkertons here?

BW: There're still a few left. A lot of them moved off. Pinkertons were from Orange County, and they moved to Rowan County and then they moved up here shortly after 1800. They lived on Old Fort Road and at one time they owned something like 2000 acres of land. Alfred Pinkerton and his daddy, Uncle Jimmie Pinkerton, and Robert Pinkerton, they were more

prosperous than the average person, they may have had a better background. They were leaders in the church, and they were the ones that made deeds for people, taught in school. But on Old Fort Road, they were the dominant family. Especially old man Alfred Pinkerton, I never heard anybody say anything bad about him. He handled everything for everybody. My great-uncle told me after his daddy died, his mother, my step-great-grandmother, somebody was arguing about the deed to the property, and his lawyer went up to her house. She handed him the deed, and he looked at it and said, "Oh, hell, old man Alfred Pinkerton made this out, this is good as gold." Handed it back to her and just walked out the door. You know, that's the way it was. Everybody trusted him, and he handled everything. He married people, he kept the church records, he made people's deeds. He was justice of the peace. They had somebody like that in every little neighborhood that handled everything. He had a good reputation, and people trusted him.

TE: Do you know if he charged people for deeds and

BW: He would charge a little something but not too much, but that's who my people used. Alfred Pinkerton was my great-grandmother's first cousin, because his mother was a Garren, and she was a Garren. So, they were somewhat intermarried, but he was the man everybody had to do everything on Old Fort Road. And just like Guy Merrell was the head man around what you think of now as downtown Swannanoa, and the Ashworths were the big wheels upper end of that. I know my great-great-granddaddy Abner Reed and Johnson Ashworth got into a feud in the 1870s and I went into some of his grandchildren's house in the 1970s, they were just friendly as could be, and I knew there was some connection, course a lot of his lawsuits were between Ashworths and Reeds, and soon as they found out I was Abner Reed's great-great-grandson, they threw me out of the house. He supposedly put a curse on them. And whether he did or not it pretty well turned out to be true. And I think Abner Reed's daddy was really an

illegitimate Ashworth. He was illegitimate. He was born in June 1802, and then John Ashworth, Jr., was arrested on the charge of bastardy about the same month. So that makes me think and it kind of fits in, because when Jacob Reed's mother had three illegitimate children and the other two more or less stayed with the Reeds. But soon as Jacob was 18 he was able to buy 100 acres of land from the Ashworths and paid cash for it. There was always a kind of connection between him and Johnson Ashworth, and Johnson Ashworth was probably his half-brother. They used to have a law up until 1890, and I really don't know why they did away with it, to keep the county from supporting illegitimate children, if a woman was pregnant and wasn't married, she was arrested and put in jail. She had to tell who the daddy was and then they would arrest him. He had to put up 500 dollars bond to ensure that the county never had to take care of his illegitimate child. And if she wouldn't tell the father, then her family would have to do it. But that avoided the county having to keep up some people's illegitimate children. That might not be a bad idea today.

JR: I wonder how that worked in with farming families looking for foster children.

BW: A lot of times they would take them into

JR: Absorbed

BW: A lot of them would get absorbed into that. They would take them in as apprentices. They would work for then until 18, and then they were supposed to give them so much, and then they would leave. But the county didn't want to keep up all these illegitimate children, so that was their means of doing it. A lot of the times, they would be assigned to somebody, and they would work them. I know David and Mary Clemmons were fairly well off, well, they descended from Pinkertons too, and they raised a whole bunch of children, because they didn't have children. They would work them, and they would give the kids a place to stay and stuff like that.

But the county didn't want to pay all that stuff back then, and I say it might not be a bad idea today. They would do that. A lot of times they wouldn't name the father, but somebody else, their family, would put up bond, or put up bond and probably they would raise the kid. The taxpayers didn't have to keep up those illegitimate children then.

TE: With your personal observation and knowledge of living in Fairview from the time period that you've mentioned and seen change, what do you foresee Fairview looking like in another decade.

BW: In another decade I would doubt if, there's going to be less and less of the people who were, families who always lived here, because they have nothing in common with the people who move in. And prices so high, I think they, their children will sell out and move somewhere else where they have a familiar culture and their money will buy twice what you can get here for the same amount of money.

TE: How is it determined, is it by County, and Fairview's not a town as such

BW: It's a township and community. People consider Fairview home. At one time the only incorporated place was Asheville, and Asheville didn't amount to nothing till the railroad come here. That was just where the lawyers and crooked politicians lived. And people don't realize that virtually Asheville was the place of last resort when you bought anything. Town was Augusta, Georgia. Neighbors would take turns going to Augusta, Georgia, somebody would go maybe every three months. It's where you bought coffee and all kinds of stuff you didn't raise on your farm. They'd buy it for three or four families. They'd go down there in their wagon, and their turn might not be but once every year and a half. Everything you bought come from Augusta, because Augusta was the closest place a ship could get, and stuff that was sent on ship was always the cheapest. If you didn't buy in Augusta, a businessman's wagon in Asheville was

the same size as a farmer's wagon in Fairview. So, he'd go down to Augusta and buy stuff for the same price you paid for it, and then have to double or triple the price to make a profit. So, they would just go down there theirself.

TE: So, it was cost.

JR: Put a time period on that.

BW: I would say at least until the 1870s town was Augusta, Georgia. It only changed when the trains begin to come into Asheville. People wouldn't buy in Asheville, they would go down there. I've always heard the first tombstone maker in Buncombe County was Thomas Wolfe's daddy and that was 1880, so if you wanted a tombstone it had to come from Augusta or Charleston. A lot of the older tombstones tell who made it in Charleston. Bur Fairview was lucky in the fact that Grandpa Lot Harper had a soapstone mine. It's soft stone, so you can cut a tombstone out and take your knife and write the name and dates on it. Now you look at it and you think you can't read it but you get chalk and rub over the tombstone you can read it. So, Fairview has got more tombstones than any place around, because that allowed a poor person to get it where they didn't have to go all the way and order it from Augusta or Charleston and go on down there and get it.

JR: Is that the mine that is at Mine Hole Gap?

BW: No, the soapstone mine was back of Fairview Elementary School, and I think they have a soapstone trail there, but it was on Grandpa Lot Harper's property. And soapstone was also used to line fireplaces too. It's soft and you can cut it, that's the reason our dates are, more tombstones are marked that any other place in the county. Soapstone was pretty rare. They had it here, so they'd just go over, Grandpa Lot Harper'd sell them some. They'd take their knife and kind of shape it. You can go out Cane Creek cemetery, think none of those are marked, but you

can go rub chalk, put flour on them, you can read their dates. Me and Edith Dearman (?) went through, I think it's 1976, and wrote down every one of them. They virtually all had grave markers, where most cemeteries around there's just a very few that do, but that allowed them the unique ability which really helped in preserving the history.

TE: Judith mentioned Mine Hole Gap. We've heard a couple stories about gold. What was mined?

BW: I really don't know. It was mined so early. It was called Mine Hole Gap 200 years ago. So, I really don't know what it was mined there. Probably maybe iron ore or saltpeter to make bullets. There is a saltpeter mine that you can still go back in there a long ways if they haven't it covered up. You turn down Cane Creek Road off of Charlotte Highway, in that development on the left. They used to use saltpeter to make bullets out of or something. So, it may have been that too.

JR: Preserving meats and making sausages too.

BW: Yeah, and a lot of it was for gunpowder, you could make bullets. Rutherford was a bigger town than Asheville for a long time, and Marion was too. You were more apt to go there than Asheville. People don't realize it, there's a town, it's only a filling station, they don't even have a post office, filling station and fire department is Brendletown. Brendletown's on 64, it's barely in Burke County, going from Morganton to Rutherfordton, and it was a big town during the goldmining era, because that's when they mined a lot of gold around there, and my people over in Flat Creek, they call it Garren Creek now on account of the fire department, Garren Creek Fire Department doesn't serve Garren Creek at all, it's in Flat Creek

JR: Yeah, it's just the Fire District

BW: Cause they already had a Flat Creek one. They would go to Brendletown to get a lawyer as late as the 1850s because it was more prominent than Asheville and now most people never heard tell of it, and it's a fire department and a filling station now. But when they were mining gold all down there in Rutherford County and southern McDowell and Burke County, it was the most important town around, and virtually nobody's heard tell of it.

JR: You mentioned Flat Creek. We had an encounter with someone said who said, I'm not from Fairview, I'm from Flat Creek. So that was a self-identified town, and she said three miles away was Broad River. They didn't consider themselves part of Fairview.

BW: Well, see, until 1926 Flat Creek and Broad River was not in part of Buncombe County.

JR: It was part of Rutherford?

BW: For a long time, it was disputed between Burke and Rutherford, so my Clemmonses and Forches lived over there, sometimes you'd see them on Burke census and sometimes the Rutherford census. In 1841 or 2 or something, it became McDowell County until 1926. And we was mentioning politics a few minutes ago, there was a bigshot person, he was a democrat, in the legislature from Old Fort. He come within a few votes of getting beat. Broad River was probably 95 per cent republican, because there wasn't no slaves over there and it still just about is. So, to make sure he stayed re-elected, they took Broad River township out of McDowell County and put it in Buncombe just to help that one politician.

JR: Gerrymandering's nothing new.

BW: That was extreme gerrymandering, took it out of the whole county. They've always had gerrymandering. They just took Broad River out and put it in Buncombe County. Because Buncombe County was Democrat enough they didn't think it would hurt it, but to save him. And

what I've heard about him, I don't know why anybody'd want to save him. Several older people around Old Fort told me that he had a chihuahua dog, and every morning he'd get up, put it on a leash, and take red lipstick and paint the dog's male organ red with lipstick and walk him around Old Fort.

JR: That's bizarre. That's sick.

BW: Think how many millions of dollars in taxes in McDowell County got lost just to save that weirdo in the legislature. You can see why even back then, he almost lost.

TE: Back to Fairview and growth or nongrowth. Fairview's a township, you said, in Buncombe County. So is it the Buncombe County government that approves any growth out here in terms of

BW: Yeah, they control everything, Buncombe County government does. There was no zoning, Buncombe County, I don't think till the late 1990s, and they had a vote on it and it lost like 8 to one in the county but they carried the city and they went ahead and put it in anyway.

JR: What was that they were voting on?

BW: Zoning. It carried the city of course but lost the county, 80-75% voted the county, but they went ahead and put it in anyway. Local people didn't like that at all.

JR: I understand there was a big hoopdeedoo about zoning about 20 years ago.

BW: Oh, yeah. That's how Nathan Ramsey got elected chairman of the county commissioners. There was a split in the community between locals and people that had recently moved in. The northerners were for it because they'd been doing that for generations, and the rural area, Fairview, Swannanoa, Leicester and all them, they didn't want nobody telling them what to do with their land. They just went ahead and did it anyway. Cause Asheville got to where it was enough it would tilt the vote in their favor rather than the county.

TE: Every community has at one time or had an individual or individuals who were considered real characters. From your family's history, kind of up through today, who were the characters, other than Mr. Whitaker himself.

BW: Oh, you mean the ones that were

TE: Maybe the storytellers who stood out.

BW: People that stood out. Well, offhand, nearly all the information I ever obtained was from women. First of all, if you wasn't kin they wasn't gonna tell you nothing. And most people, they were private. My great-granddaddy's sons asked me who their granddaddy and grandpa was, they didn't know, because their daddy told them it was none of their business. But you had a few people and they were usually women, they were blabbermouths, you had to find their kids, they were the ones knew the information. Once you proved you was kin they'd tell you literally anything. My Aunt Sue we'd called her, Susan Salina Riley, and she married Ben Chatham. She told her girls everything, so I visited two of her daughters, my grandmother's first cousins, I'd visit them one a month for years. They lived together and they'd talk among each other. They would come up with something new every week. And Eva Smart, her mother was a Trantham, whose mother was a Wright. Who would have been my great-granddaddy Wright's sister and their grandpa Travis was a Whitaker. So, I proved I was a kin to her. She was blind, and she could remember songs she heard one time when she was four years old. She could get the family album down, and her blind, and tell me who everyone who was in the picture by describing their clothes. She told me literally everything.

JR: What a memory she had.

BW: Another one was Neely Merrell, who was a, Guy Merrell, who was a, run Fairview's mother. She was the first telephone operator. She would listen in on every call. So,

she knew everything, too, and I'd go see her. So, you had certain source people, just a handful in Fairview knew stuff. Mountain people are usually pretty private. They wouldn't tell their kids nothing, it was none of their business. That's the way they felt about it. But these three-four women in particular- Carrie Jenkins and Carmy Guthey – they were both Chathams, and Eva Smart, she was never married and Neely Merrell, she was a Morgan but I say she was a phone operator so she heard everything everybody said- they were my best sources. And another thing that benefitted Fairview too was the fact they had early Quaker ancestors and Quakers kept good records. They had a different calendar, it was three months different from everybody else. Can't remember off the top of my head whether it was three months ahead or three months back, you had to convert it from Quaker calendar to our calendar. And then too, when people left Fairview there'd be ten or twelve people and they'd all move the same place. Well early 1830s a whole bunch of people from Fairview moved to Gallatin, Missouri, which is in Davies County, which is northwest, north-central Missouri. Well, it wasn't two or three years later that Joseph Smith and the Mormons were driven out of Kansas City. The Mormons believed that the Garden of Eden was where Kansas City was. Course I guess nobody knows, that's what they thought. So, they drove them out of there and they moved to Gallatin, Missouri. Naturally there was some intermarrying. So that was good for genealogy because in 1870 my great-great-granddaddy's older brother, his wife had died in Gallatin, he married a Mormon and moved to Utah. Mormons believe in preserving their genealogy. So he wrote his baby brother here and his grandpa Henry and his son-in-law, and nephew, went around to all his relative's houses in Fairview and asked them stuff and copied their Bible and Uncle James come here from Utah to get the material and he stayed here and did mission work, and the whole place just about went Mormon, till the machine outlawed Mormonism. There had been a split in the Fairview Baptist Church. The 95%

majority thought they ought to run the show, but the 5% that gave 90% of the money thought that they ought to run the show. So, you had the Ashworths and the Merrells and the people with money, they had a big falling out, and they's not as many people go there now as they did in the 1860s and 1870s. About that time Uncle James Whitaker come here and since he was from Fairview and a kin to everybody, they listened to him, and the whole place nearly went Mormon, until the machine outlawed it and you either had to convert back to what you were or move to Utah. Some moved back to Utah, some practiced Mormonism in their house, the rest of them converted back to Baptist. But they wouldn't go back to that church, and that's how Pleasant Grove and Spring Mountain got started. My first cousin, her husband joined Fairview Baptist Church, originally called Cane Creek, she's the first one of the family's been a member of that church since the 1870s. And people didn't know why. We were always brought up, you don't go there.

JR: But the Quakers meanwhile, they've been absorbed

BW: Most Quakers become Baptists after they move to North Carolina. If they didn't they ended up moving to around Richmond, Indiana. So most early Baptists around here were Quakers, but Quakers tend to become Baptists.

JR: But they kept their ways.

BW: They kept a lot of their ways. Some of the stuff that people believe today, I've been brough up to believe, some of it may have been a little bit of Quaker influence still there, a little bit of Mormon influence. I was always brought up that you always keep enough that you can go six months without work with no problem. That come from Mormonism, it didn't come from Baptist. But it been in line so long, people didn't know that. But you gradually keep a little bit for both reasons. Mormons were right on that point. You ought to keep six months laid back.

BW: You have a little bit of that in there, but when the machine outlawed Mormonism, there were some that moved to Utah, but most of them went back to Baptist, but they started Spring Mountain or Pleasant Grove. Like Aunt Sally Jenkins and Aunt Martha Jenkins, they stayed Mormon but they just practiced it in their home.

TE: They kept it private.

BW: They kept it private, and they wouldn't do anything about it. I reckon the machine felt that threatened their power. People think the Ku Klux Klan only persecuted blacks. But in the western part of the state most of their victims were white. Because there wasn't enough blacks to be a threat. One of the biggest Ku Klux Klan raids there was, was in western North Carolina. They attacked downtown Rutherford and what they attacked were essentially Republicans because there wasn't enough blacks

JR: Nobody to pick on.

BW: They wasn't enough to be a threat. What the Ku Klux Klan was formed, a lot of the counties especially along the fall line had the most slaves, because that's the furthest the boat could go to, they were 85% black. That's where the Ku Klux Klan was active. It was more of the threat to power than it was the race. But up here there wasn't enough of them to threaten them so they didn't pay that much attention. It was the rural whites tended to be what they called radicals back then. So, it was mainly who threatened them was who they bothered.

TE: That kind of brings me around a little bit to the next thing I wanted to ask you about, and that is from when you moved to Fairview and started living until today, do you see a difference in the sense of feeling of safety in Fairview compared to back when you moved here.

BW: It's got more and more safe. I was here every week before I moved here, I'd be at my grandmother's, stuff like that. It used to until people started moving in, if somebody broke in to something, you pretty well knew who it was, because they was certain families that traditionally had sticky fingers, and there were certain families particularly had drinking problems, and the prostitution deal and everything, you probably knew who it was. One thing they used to do, and I think it's based on the Bible, for Christians to settle their own differences, so they would at the end of church, they would ask if the church was in harmony, and then if someone was having trouble with some member of the church he would tell it and they would send deacons out to interview both sides. Since church was only once a month, and then they would bring it up in church, and the church would decide the issue. There wasn't no objections or anything like that. Anybody told anything their little heart desired. The church took care of stuff like that. If you cheated somebody, the church would recommend a remedy, and if you didn't do it you were kicked out of the church. That was bad back then. People, that would spread you were a crook. And you had to make amends, and they might return you to fellowship. But the church would decide stuff like that according to the law. One thing about that, since everybody was somehow a kin and knew your daddy and grandma, it was hard to lie and get by with it.

JR: Are you talking about 19th century or is this extending into the 20th?

BW: This extended into the twentieth to some degree. The church thought that people in the church should handle their own problems, and I don't know whether it worked better or not but it was certainly harder, it was almost impossible to lie. Now you go to court here. You got the twelve most ignorant people in the county, on the jury. They don't know nothing about you

or nobody else. But if you're tried at church, everybody knew you since you were born, your daddy and grandpa, so you had to really be careful about lying.

TE: Well, with the church being involved, it certainly would be a strong motivator for people to say I don't want that to be me.

BW: Yeah, it was. In court, you wanted to say that, no lawyer could holler objection. You could say anything your little heart desired. It was pretty easy to uncover the truth. You didn't have these people who didn't know you that try you now. And there wasn't no lawyer to object to anything. The truth usually come out.

TE: As far as safety, do you lock your doors?

BW: I lock my doors. If I was robbed, it would still actually be an outsider, because the original folks, they're still, you're one of us. Usually if you're robbed, you're robbed by somebody from Asheville or somebody that's moved in. It's a waste of time to have the law anyway, they won't take fingerprints in Buncombe County anymore, so you can't catch nobody. I don't know why.

TE: For any reason?

BW: If your house is robbed, they won't take fingerprints. They robbed my first cousin's daughter. She'd had change in a jar, and they picked up the glass jar, and poured it into their sack. And they refused to fingerprint it. I don't know if they considered that racist, or what. But if you don't fingerprint, you really can't catch nobody anymore, not much use calling the law. I don't understand that. Everybody I talked to recently was robbed out here says the sheriff's department refused to fingerprint them. Only thing I can figure is they consider that to be racist. Of course they call anything, anybody you don't agree with, they call him a Nazi or racist, because they don't have enough intelligence to come up with a real argument. For some reason

they don't take fingerprints anymore. So, it's virtually useless to call the law. If you don't have fingerprints, how can you prove it?

JR: Unless you got video cameras, which everybody seems to have.

BW: A lot of people getting those now. They're getting more adept at putting them out of commission.

TE: You'd mentioned a little bit earlier in talking about people taking wagons and going down to Georgia to get supplies that were cheaper down there and brought back. Do you have any recall of some of your grandparents or uncles back in time talking about transportation modes. About how people who might have lived here in Fairview got to where they wanted to go.

BW: You either walked, or by horse or wagon. I know Robert Lawson Wright, my third-great-granddaddy's brother, he took a wagon with him to Langford, to Augusta to get supplies, and it was pulled by six horses. And someway coming up Saluda Gap, it turned over and he got killed. Saluda Gap isn't Saluda Mountain, people think they're the same, Saluda Gap is the old road, goes down through Greenville, that gap, and it wasn't Saluda Mountain. Some people talk about going up Saluda Gap they think of the mountain, they're two different places. They would go down that gap the old road to Greenville, and someway or another, something excited the horses, turned over the wagon, and he was killed. They brough him back up here, and he's buried at Cane Creek, I think in 1864 or '65. That's the way they used to go down there. They talk about the old drovers' road. They never was no drovers road went through Fairview. That's a myth. The old drovers road, people brought hogs, cattle, chickens, and turkey from Kentucky especially. And they would come down through here in the spring and they would go down the

French Broad River to Augusta to sell their crops in Georgia or South Carolina. North Carolina was probably the poorest southern state, because it didn't have navigable rivers.

TE: So, no droving took place through Hickory Nut Gap?

BW: No, they didn't do that. They tell that tale, but it doesn't lead to and from a market. Even if you were driving somewhere from Fairview, you would go down Cane Creek and hit the road take you to South Carolina or Georgia. Because they used to call North Carolina a valley of humility between two towers of conceit. And that was South Carolina and Virginia. They were both rich southern states and North Carolina was the poorest one because you can't go up the river any length of time. All the business had to be between those two states. But they would drive down. I know my aunt Elizabeth Foster that married John Mitchell Alexander they had the big inn in Alexander and that was one of the places that they would stop. Some of her kids would talk about, like, 10,000 ducks coming through at one time. They said in the fall, there'd be wagons lined up for miles, bringing corn to their farm for them to pile up to feed the droves that come through in the spring. Alexander Inn there was one of the stops. And they'd have a place every ten or twelve miles. They would go down the river, because going over a mountain would cause whatever you were going to lose weight. They lost weight, you got less out of it. That's why nobody never drove nothing over Hickory Nut Gap. If you were a native of Fairview, you would go down through Flat Creek down Morgan Hill Road, number 9, because you don't have to go over a mountain. And that's the way locals still go. You know I bet I haven't been over Hickory Nut Gap four times in my life because that's the worst road to go down there. You always go down through Broad River.

JR: Are you referring to the Buncombe Turnpike as being the real drovers road?

BW: If you call that the one down through Madison County and Henderson County. This road through Fairview never was a main road. No, if you were going down through there, if you were local and all locals still, they would never go through Hickory Nut Gap, they would go down Morgan Hill Road or down number 9 because it's a whole lot better road. And it still is today. I've been over that mountain so few many times, I wouldn't hardly recognize nothing down through there, because it's the bad way to go.

TE: I shiver a little bit when I drive through there, but I was curious when I moved here. Judith, do you have any topics or questions that we haven't touched on?

JR: I've kind of been putting in my two cents worth as we went along.

TE: Mr. Whitaker, do you have any area or topic, information that you want to share that we haven't touched on that would be helpful to understanding Fairview then and now?

BW: Even to a large extent today, there never was no connection between Fairview and Asheville. And it was that way most areas. Asheville had slaves, rural areas didn't, never had nothing in common, on account of being settled by people from different regions. There never was any real connection between the rural areas and Asheville. They were settled with different people with different ideas. There was no connection. Even today, if I have to have something now, I go to town. Of course, I don't go downtown, 'cause it's a rip-off place. Even going to Walmart or Patton Avenue, I usually don't go there, I get it somewhere else, because it's always cheaper. I always, all my family was brought up, you go out and eat somewhere on a Saturday and you usually wouldn't be around here. You'd take a little ride. So, we'd usually go to Greenville, Tennessee. My mother, there used to be a Bonanza there, she liked to eat there. And if you go to Greenville, you'd eat at Morrison's, some of the places down there. Asheville never

did figure much in our life. People didn't go there much, and they still don't use it much. They'd rather go somewhere else.

TE: Do you feel a little bit like a duck out of water sometimes?

BW: Oh yeah, It's a different world. I'd feel more at home in Paris than I would in Asheville.

TE: Well you truly are a gem with all the information that you have, and we so greatly appreciate it.

BW: And mountain people were so independent, too, with Asheville they wouldn't be waited on hand and foot. The rural mountain people being self-sufficient. There never was no connection between them. It gets bigger every day, you know.

JR: The town people look down on the country people.

BW: Oh yeah, they look down on country people.

JR: And the country people get a chip on their shoulder about the town people.

BW: Well, the town people try to boss them all the time. They think they know everything. Well, you know, most of them, if you come from New Yorkers think know everything anyway. It's just a different world, different ideas. And when you can get a whole lot of nicer stuff cheaper somewhere else. I can get stuff even more expensive than you can buy in Asheville for 2 dollars in Atlanta or south Nashville, why would you want to go to Asheville? You go down there for a show, there might be somebody appear, Tom Jones at the Atlanta Symphony, Paul Anka at Nashville. Go down to a show three-four times a year, go to these rich-y neighborhoods and stock up on expensive stuff, that they give away, why would you want to go into town and do that

TE: That's true. That's true.

BW: And look down on you

TE: And thank you so much for this interview. We truly appreciate it. It's going to be valuable information in this project.

JR: Thank you, that was very interesting, and you filled in a lot of gaps, helped us understand better.

BW: New people move here can't believe Augusta was town. Somebody went there every three months, maybe your turn might not be but every year and a half, and stuff was probably a quarter of what it would be here, and I guess it was nice to go to the big town every now and then anyway. That was probably a big treat.

TE: Out of curiosity if nothing else.

END OF INTERVIEW

(Philip Blocklyn, 12 April 2020)